

No Longer Tossed To and Fro

Proper 13

Pastor Josh Frazee

Ephesians 4:1-16

Grace, peace, and mercy be to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Have you heard the word? Today's Tractor Sunday! Hopefully all of you who use them brought one with you! I guess it's a little late now... We're well-past the first time some of you heard that news.

Today in our Epistle lesson, Paul is writing to those in Ephesus about how they're getting past the first time they heard the Word, the Word about Jesus. He writes to them in order that they may no longer be tossed to and fro by the waves of the doctrines of humanity.

There are times in our lives as Christians that we are called to stand firm on the doctrine of the Scriptures. The image has been compared to a sailor steering a vessel through the waters of the Sirens from Greek mythology. In the mythology, one must plug their ears to the song of the Sirens going on all around them so that they will not be led into catastrophe. For Christians, they must plug their ears to the waves of doctrines being spoken all around them so that they will not be led into real catastrophe.

So Paul reminds those at Ephesus of the doctrine which they have learned; and which we will hear again today. The doctrine centered around Jesus Christ as the Savior of all of humanity.

Verse 1

Our text begins: "I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all."

By his first words in this part of his letter, Paul reminds his hearers that he has been put under arrest for the sake of the cross of Jesus. No longer tossed to and fro by the doctrines of the Pharisees, he knew Jesus as his Savior and stood on the solid ground of Christ—even when it meant his own arrest!

Knowing the surpassing greatness of God's love in Christ Jesus—His death and resurrection in his place—Paul admonishes, or encourages and commands, his fellow believers in Ephesus to "walk in a manner worthy of (their) calling." He reminds them that they have been called to Christian unity. For that reason, they are to act in humility, gentleness, and patience with one another. Paul is able to make such statements because he knows that the Spirit is at work in them so that they might be "eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." After all, they were called to believe in "one body and one Spirit...one hope...one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all."

Today that admonition applies to you as well. You have been called by the Lord to the one faith. You were received by Him in one baptism. But there are as many false doctrines circulating about who Jesus is now as there were in Paul's day. There are those like the Sadducees who doubt the resurrection—even though Jesus Himself rose from the dead. There are those today like the Pharisees who doubt that Jesus was the Messiah to come. They are still waiting for a Messiah to come—even though Jesus fulfilled every prophecy of the Old Testament. There are those today who believe that the body is evil and that leaving this world as a spirit is the only way to be saved—even though God came into this world in the flesh in His Son Jesus Christ. The list could go on and on. That's why Paul admonishes you to remember the faith to which you were called. And he admonishes you not only to remember the faith, but to grow in it to maturity. Hear what he writes as he continues his text.

Verse 2

“But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift...(H)e gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.”

Paul leaves no room for bowing out. Yes some are called to be evangelists and prophets and shepherds and teachers, but they are all called to do what? “(T)o equip the saints.” Who are the saints? You! You are the saints! You are the saints being equipped for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ.

But in order to rightly speak about Jesus and to be of assistance in building up the body of Christ, you must first learn solid doctrine. You must continue to hear and learn until you have reached maturity—that you may no longer be children. Consider children today. Children watch commercials and want everything that they see. You, as parents and grandparents and guardians, have maturity. You know that not everything is as it’s advertised. You are not easily swayed.

Paul thus encourages you to reach that maturity in your faith life. No longer be swayed by every quote-unquote “commercial” for your faith life. Some things may look good and appeal to us by our old sinful nature. Being able to have that new car that your neighbor has. Being able to have sex with whoever you want. Being able to sin all you want and then ask for forgiveness later. It all sounds good, but those who are mature in their faith know that none of those things works out for the benefit of the body of Christ.

And those are the easy ones. Knowing why we practice what we practice is on the path to what Paul is referring to here. Children are not always told why they cannot buy that toy from the advertisement on TV, but adults know the reason, whether or not the child is old enough to learn why. But when the child is old enough, the parents explain their reasoning. So, too, you are called to hear and learn so that you may learn the reasons why we do what we do and believe what we believe.

The Old Man does not want to do this. He wants to go along with every commercial and idea that sounds good and that feed his sinful desires. He wants to hear these things spoken to him. But that is not what the New Man desires.

Verse 3

“Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.”

Take a moment to consider the human body. When every part is working, the body repairs itself and builds itself up. Muscles get torn when doing exercise, yet they get rebuilt even stronger as they heal. White blood cells attack and kill foreign objects which may try to harm the body. And the body grows—at least to a particular age. Those are the things a body is supposed to do—and it does do those things when it is working properly.

The same is true of the body of Christ, of whose body you are a member. When your neighbors or you get torn by the stresses of battling Satan and falsehoods, you go to build your neighbor up with God's Word. Or they come to build you up if you need it. When falsehoods arise, you, in your maturity of faith, are equipped to denounce and kill it before it spreads, causing damage to your neighbors and the rest of the body of Christ. And in speaking the truth in love to each other, you build up the body of Christ.

So we speak the word. We've told others about Tractor Sunday so that they could bring their machinery to be blessed this morning. And shortly we'll do just that. But more importantly, we speak the Word about Jesus. We speak about how He died for the sins of the world. He has paid the price for every way in which we have not kept God first. He has bought us back for every time we have not loved our neighbors as we should. He has saved us from every time we have gone after the desires of the Old Man instead of living as His redeemed. Jesus Christ has saved us by His death and resurrection, as we hear about every Sunday morning. And so we also continue to come and learn more and more about Him so that we can refute any false doctrine and that we may build each other up as the body of Christ. This we can do by the power of the Spirit of God who has been given to you for Jesus' sake. In Jesus' Name. Amen.